A black and white photograph of a man in a suit and hat, leaning against a car. The man is looking towards the camera. The background shows a street with trees and a building. A library stamp is overlaid on the image, reading: "Circulation Desk", "The Library", "Birmingham Southern College", "Birmingham, Alabama 35204".

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Birmingham, Alabama 35204**

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COVER: Designed by Scott Fuller and
Photographed by Bobby Hanson

CREAM BROKE UP LAST YEAR

We all held our pocketsful of time so tightly--
some not enough;
But they are dead and just a part of it.
Today's collections and tomorrow's junk
are causes, corpses, and catastrophes.
We read our Steppenwolf and Zarathustra
and spoke of them, as men once did of Proust.
We said the catchwords and the battlecrys,
the shibboleths, the minute common lines.
The causes that rebelled within our hearts,
the gloomy hardships justice seemed to miss,
are jokes on the verandas where we sit.
Atrocities decay and stale with time.
Some Gattaca's overturned their worlds;
Romanovs have been brought down in theirs.
Who knows but that a shot felt round the world
will end its course and die where it began?

Monroe. She left us shocked and often weary.
It's difficult to see how tinsel burns.
The movies. They died with her and will die
as pocketsful of time come to their close.
Alas and did our saviors bleed
their not-so-very-precious blood.
No cause will hang in one great hand
or stumble when it falls.

From our verandas they all seem like
new Barrabi, new Jerusalems.
Fools rush in; angels are too wise.
Sit back; find inspiration
on the walls of tombs Etruscan.
What a garden Hedon must have been.
And we Dickensian worst and best
in our tight-held pocketsful of time.

Mike Holmes

It is unusual, I think
 that the skinny green needles
 live all year; the fine
 broad green leaves die quickly.
 Summer sets on the annual horizon;
 green leaves douse peroxide
 on the locks of their boughs
 and die with the color change.
 The skinny green ones pale;
 they die discreetly--maintain the
 status quo.
 The martial boot crushes both
 diers, fickle and discreet,
 beneath a steel-tipped heel.
 Quarries flee eternal hunters,
 never ending o're the carnage
 that forms the carpet.
 Another well-planned conquest launched--
 another deathly harvest melts
 earthward, burying the last year's fall.
 The bones and carcasses
 integrate with finality.
 An alien settles with a plop
 into the all absorbing mess.
 Solventae Bacterium assault
 the perichitin cellulosaes
 all the season eat with passion,
 futility apparent in the spring,
 Slowly
 With the speed of growth,
 a yellow finger pokes
 a horny tip from deep within.
 A dark crevasse sunders all
 the dead attackers could not split.
 Slowly--with the passing of a youth
 and infancy, a greenish blush
 disguises--or unmasks--the child.
 Recognition allays suspicions;
 all the corpses turn to peaceful rot.
 Nurture sucked from last year's life,
 Nothing new is under the grass.
 And nothing is unusual, I think.

Mike Holmes



hospitals

watch
in deep darkness
inside the white-sheet mausoleum
death
lurking behind each weakened heartbeat -
listen
in empty echoes
to the light-toed tipping
death
stealing up silently to snatch a soul -
feel
in love - lost sorrow
the cold chromium barred
death
delighted to capture a corpse -
death
in ether air
slithering through vented rooms
crawling over life like an eager maggot

Greg Stone



OLD HOUSES

Riding through this neighborhood,
I see the houses, old, and think
Of what has come to pass
Before my days.
Rambling houses, rows of them,
Relics of the lives of those
Who have now grown old.
Rattling houses in the wind, they tell
Of how the feet of yesterday's young men
Trod on their porches,
While red-lipped ladies
Waited by the doors.
Now they are old and wretched,
Wasting, waiting for their
Final condemnation.

Ellen Brake

For Good
In your lead-lined apartment
Complex you smile benevolently
And realize: The Army has found
Salvation! on the corner
Where masked men fly-by-night
In their gray flannel suits.

Are you faded and wrinkled too?
Good! Just try our new one-step
Steam (roller) process, already in
Wide use by Chiefs of Car nage
And other high-ranking
Used car dealers.

Of course you can retaliate if the
Doctors say your potty training
Has been made obsolete by General Motors.
They know reality is a chore
When the small-bore rifle
Is aimed upon you.

Ye Gods! Go Darwin over madness!

Allen Sumner

Red Palm Tree Rhythm In A Lonely Bed

The Spring rains come
After dry slimy winter, and
Moisture soaks into my roots
Half limp, each hairy bud floats
Sensed above the crawling calling skin.

I'm a tree wrapped in wet blankets,
And the rainy morning drizzles into the
Heavy air droplets atmosphere cool sheets.
Through the wet foliage my tuber-eyes
Call and crawl for Astarte Earth-Slut
Faceless bitch with winter linen's skin.

Blood full turnips push and satin bulbs
Reflecting light red squeak against hairy brown.
Tropism and the shoots break surface
sprouting peach, reach for heat,
Imbibing rain swells swings in air.
Little Rosie comes along.
Red Palm Tree rhythm in a lonely bed.

Clinton Anderson



The Game
Or
What Every Man Searches For

Time: Anytime
Place: Anywhere

At rise, we find two characters seated at opposite ends of a small table. Between them, placed in the center of the table, is a small black box. As the lights come up slowly, the one named JOHN is drumming on the box nervously with his fingers. His partner, named SMITH, is gazing at a gaping hole in his coat and pays no attention at all to John. When the lights reach their peak (he notes this quite obviously) SMITH brushes off his coat in a ceremonial fashion, slips it on, buttons the one button, and speaks-

Smith (indicating that the lights have risen). It's time again, John. Shall we begin?

John (with animation) Oh yes, Smith. Let's!

(Almost imperceptable pause)

Smith. Well?

John. But surely I shouldn't begin. I'd much rather give you the honor. (He slides his chair back from the table and takes a rather complacent look around him.)

Smith. Thank you, John. But no-I'm afraid you simply must begin.

John (childlike). It's not fair! You always make me begin. Why don't you start for a change.

Smith (patiently). You forget, John. I started the last time.

John. No you didn't

Smith. John. . . .

John. You always use me

Smith. Please, John you. . .

John. . . .make me your puppet but no more! Either you begin or I leave

Smith. . . .know what happens when we break the traditional pattern.

John. I don't care what . . . (Lights flicker ominously.) Oh. HE'S here.

Smith. Yes

John (indicating the audience). But why so many of the others?

Smith. (angrily). Are we to question his actions? If he sent them here it must mean that perhaps this time one of us will succeed.

John (with dawning understanding). Oh.

Smith. Do you realize you could disqualify us by asking thought provoking questions? Now-please begin.

John. But, I've never done it in from of THEM before. It's different.

Smith. How so?

John. Well, it's their eyes. I can feel them-watching, probing, touching-every part of me. And I can hear their thoughts: Will it work? Will we be satisfied? Don't you understand? Some things are done better without observers. Man must perform certain duties alone.

Smith. You are never alone.

John. What?

Smith. HE is always here. Now get on with it.

John. (grasping for any excuse) But-it's too cold. It must be the correct temperature.

Smith. So help me. . .

John (urgently) Aaand the wind's blowing in the wrong direction. You know the conditions must be right. It's part of that wonderful tradition you spoke about.

Smith. What the hell does wind direction and temperature have to do with our ritual? Besides, man must not be bound by tradition.

John. Ahh! You just contradicted yourself. You finally made a mist--

Smith. Life is a series of contradiction after contradiction. Mistake after mistake. Failure after failure.

John. That's the truth. We've certainly failed miserably in our little game.

Smith. Game? It's our life-our passion. When we bring our life work down to the level of a "game" then we have failed.

John. If life is a contradiction, it is even more of a game! One big game of tennis. Back and forth, back and forth. Even THEY are trapped. See how their heads follow our movements? (He walks about the stage.) Here. Or here. Or even here. Bah! They have no more freedom than we do.

(At this the lights flicker again-even more ominous than before. Immediately they resume their positions at the table. Smith picks up the box, dusts off the top of it, and offers it to JOHN. He accepts. He slowly opens it and pulls out a small revolver. He looks at SMITH who nods at him. JOHN gives one look to the audience, one glance to the above, places the gun to his head, and fires. Nothing happens. He tries again. Still nothing happens.

Discouraged, he hands the gun to SMITH. He pauses a moment-then places the gun to his head, and fires. Nothing. He too tries again. Nothing. He places the gun back in the box and sets it back in the center of the table.)

John. Damn!

Smith. Don't be too discouraged-maybe next time.

John. Oh, yes. There will be a next time won't there? When do you think we should try again?

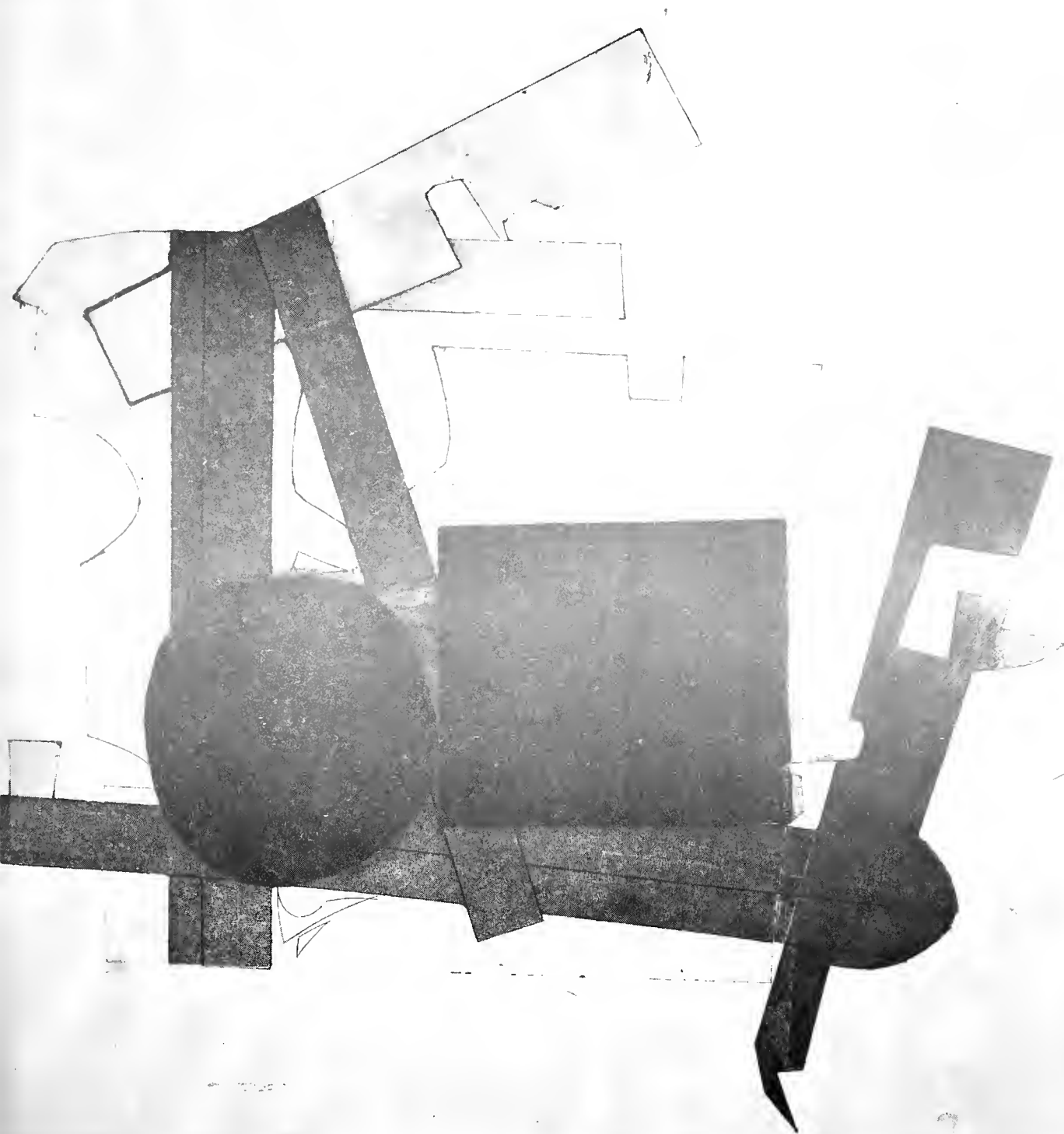
Smith. In an hour I should say. They should have returned by then. Perhaps then it will work.

John. See you in an hour then? Same place, etc.?

Smith. Yes. In an hour. At the same place. Good-bye.

(JOHN begins to finger the box again. SMITH takes off his coat, sits across from JOHN, and observes the hole in it as the lights slowly fade to-BLACKOUT..)

Terrell Finney



When I, suspended from my human thread
Of Non-elastic nature, meet a choice
Of whether to surrender, or give voice
To what is seeming, that great dread
Of too much burden, too much hate
To hang upon my lifeline, precious blood
Or of my name with deep arraignments scored
By some mock jury deep; I wait
And choose the course of all my race--
The race of man--and run
A course I never had begun
And speak the words which spark a pleasant face
And prove with every scratching of a pen:
Men fear not gods, But men.

Mike Holmes



Mind

Clearer, clear
The image comes forth
into brilliant focus
Idledown drifting
Back to the misty mass-
time tale
dwindling
Dawn breaks into streams
of splendor
color wheel turning
memory rings
Time stands still,
One instant poignant
picture of the artist
exhibited
halted
Misty time waits not,
veiling the second,
drifting in fog.

Amy Douglas



The Strange

Left yesterday slowly singing
mild moods, experience and food
the slow short cycle of calm
dragging onward like a cloudy day in fall
wandering leaves drizzle
muted colors turning slowly in the fog
to the bleached patchwork of the strange
Saw an acorn die today.
not an easy death, but the slow squishing
of a great oak tree.
The dimensions of life left behind
the slow roll of the breakers pounds on jagged rocks
leaving the long stretch of level sand
Wearing down life to the drizzle of the sky
and the blended patchwork of the strange

Jim Page1



Joy-ride

The moon was already climbing into the clouds, even though it was not yet dark. The boy sat by the side of the road, leaning against his pack, and watching it rise, pale against the reddish backdrop of the sunset sky. Then turning over on his side, he yawned and shut his eyes. Beside him the road ran, two-laned and empty, down the hillside and curved around to disappear into the woods at the base of the hill. At the distant murmur of a motor he rose to his feet and peered anxiously up and down the highway, but the sound turned away to his right and slowly faded out. He sighed and stood there quietly, still looking down the road. From over the hilltop a wind blew up, gentle but chilly, and he shivered. Reaching down to his pack, he opened the drawstring and lifted out a grey sweatshirt. He slipped it on over his head and then hoisted the pack up on his shoulders. After a final glance behind him, he stepped out on the pavement and began walking down the middle of the highway, following the trail of the yellow dividing line. Twenty feet off either side of the highway, there was the forest, a solid wall of green rising abruptly out of the ground. But he did not look at the forest, and he did not look behind him at the dying sun. He kept his eyes on the yellow markers. A sound of wings broke the stillness, and he looked up to see a large bird passing

overhead beneath the rising moon. He stared at it for a moment and smiled and stuck out his thumb. The bird screeched, hanging in the air in a slow circle, and then flew on by.

(Early morning sunlight, so bright it hurts the eyes. A blue Ford Galaxy, two-door, comes around the corner, tires squealing. At the sight of the boy it stops. "Where you going?" "D.C." "Get in" and slam! he's inside. Two-toned, vinyl seats, cigarettes and small talk with the large fat man behind the wheel.

"You a student?"

"Sort of."

"Out for a while, huh?"

"Yeah, for a while."

Silence, of the convivial early morning variety. Then

"Well that's fine, but y'know y'ought ta go back. Wish I had gone; couldn't afford it though. Went straight into business. Oh, s'not so bad. I can't complain, I try to keep up though. Y'know, read a little in my spare time."

"That's good."

"What?"

"That you try to keep up. That's a good thing to do."

"Yeah, well it ain't much. But I do what I can." Pause. "You know anything about existentialism?"

"Had a course in it."

"Now that's really interesting stuff. Wish they'd taught us stuff like that in my day. I might've paid more attention in school. I tell you the one I tell you the one I really is 'Sartray'. Boy, I been reading a lot of his stuff. He's really good."

"Hmmm."

Roadsigns whizz by against a background of abandoned barns and farm houses, broken fences and overgrown pastures. Another attempt to resurrect the dying conversation.

"What do you do?"

"Huh?"

"What do you do for a living. You said you were in business. What kind?"

"Oh, I sell life insurance."

The boy laughs. "You're kidding!"

"Huh?"

"Nothing." More laughter.

The moon was high in the sky now, but because it was not yet full, it gave little light to the darkness below. Two miles farther down the highway at a farm road junction, the boy sat leaning against a mileage marker that was almost swallowed up by the thick undergrowth creeping up from the field behind it. His feet were propped up on his pack, and over the grey sweatshirt he had placed a dark blue windbreaker that made him blend in even more with the blackness of his surroundings. The air was much colder now. A thin trail of smoke issued forth from his mouth when he breathed. Across the road in a small pasture similar clouds of mist were rising from the nostrils of a milling, stamping herd of cattle. Their white faces were ghostly in the moonlight, as they peered through the fence and moored loudly at the silent intruder across the road. But the boy did not look at them. He untied his right shoe and shook it hard in the air. A small pebble clattered to the ground. He was putting the shoe back on his foot when a low muffled roar began somewhere

in the distance. He stood up suddenly, his shoe still untied, and stepped out on the road. He listened intently. It was a car, and it was coming in his direction. He stepped back to pick up his pack. The sign above him said WASHINGTON 125

Midday on the freeway, a hamburger at Mac Donald's, and a rest stop at a Gulf station. The cloud-covered sun is still warm, and he sweats watching the stream of traffic roar past. Waiting always waiting. And watching for the one, the one that always comes - eventually. And there it is, a slight tension, an irrational feeling of recognition, and suddenly a tan Karman Ghia leaves the pack and stops on the road side. The inevitable question and response, and then inside - only one person as usual, a fairly young one, - and another starched confrontation begins.

"You a student?"

The drone of voices is peaceful in the warm sun. No sleep, however. He gets rides for conversation. It's impolite to sleep.

"Now I guess you've seen a lot on your trip. Tell me, what's the mood of the people. I mean, where do they think this country's heading?"

"I don't know if they worry about it too much. The one's I've seen anyway."

"Mebbe so. Mebbe so."

A maze of entrances and exits, lights and signs. They are coming into a town. The man shakes his head. He is a writer and he speaks with authority.

"Well, you know what I think's wrong with this country?"

"No what?"

"I think we're simply a nation tormented by doubt."

"How's that?"

"Well it's the spirit of the times. You know it used to be that people were optimistic, confident, sure of where they were heading. Then they were active, things got done, nobody was afraid that he was always doing the wrong thing. Then everybody began to doubt themselves. You can see it everywhere. In the church, politics, the family. Doubt eating away at everyone's insides, making everybody

impotent, unable to make decisions. People need to have faith that they can do things right. They need to believe that there's some hope, to have confidence in some basic answers.

"What are the answers?"

Silence.

"To tell you the truth, I don't know."

More silence. Then they both laughed.

As the car approached the junction, its headlights flicked from dim to bright illuminating the dark figure standing by the roadside. The motor grew softer as the car slowed down, and a head appeared at the window, staring into the shadows. The boy began to wave his hands when the car kept rolling through the intersection, and he turned to yell at the receding taillights. One hundred yards past the sign the brake lights suddenly flashed on, and the car stopped, its engine continuing to roar even while idling. Hurriedly the boy grabbed his pack and ran to the waiting vehicle. As he came alongside the car, the passenger door swung open, and the person on that side stepped out and motioned to the back seat.

"See if you can get in there. It's a pretty small car.

The boy smiled at him

"Don't worry. I'll get in somehow," he said shoving his pack into the cramped space in the rear, and crawled inside. He nodded at the driver, who turned and looked at him as he was arranging his gear to make room for his legs. The driver's eyes were open wide in a vacant stare, yet even in the semi-darkness of the overhead light, his pupils were strangely contracted.

"M'names John," he mumbled and pointed to his companion. "Thas Ronnie."

The boy's "Hello" was muffled by the slam of the car door, as Ronnie stepped back inside. He did not offer his own name, and they did not speak. They sat there in the darkness, not speaking for several minutes. The sound of the engine seemed almost hypnotic, a low rumble that made the compacted body of the little car vibrate in rhythm

with it. The boy shifted his legs, already beginning to knot up from the combination of the long walk and the lack of floor space, and rested quietly with his head pressed against the cool vinyl of the back seat. He was waiting again, but at least this time he was waiting inside, away from the cold.

"Hey, John, wake up," Ronnie said abruptly. John lifted his head from the steering wheel. "Come on, give us some heat, man. This guy must be freezing. And let's go; it's late."

John moved slowly, mechanically, and flipped the switch for the heat. From somewhere, a warm current of air began to blow across the floorboard of the car. The boy relaxed and slipped further down into the seat, pressing his knees against Ronnie's bucket seat. The warmth of the air filled the car, but as it played over him, he shivered. His whole body ached with the desire to go to sleep. The purr of the heater harmonized with the putter of the engine. The boy blinked suddenly and sat up.

"Hey you guys are going to D.C. aren't you?"

Ronnie jumped at the sound of his voice.

"Yeah, sure, man." He laughed. "Stick with us, you've got a good ride. You're home free."

The boy smiled and settled back into his lounging position.

"That's great, man. That's great."

He was asleep almost as soon as his head hit the seat. He lay there with his mouth half-open and did not stir, even when, with a violent roar of the engine and a screech of tires, John threw the car in gear and accelerated into the night.

Four o'clock, the time when morning hamburgers have long since been broken down into proteins and enzymes that leave only emptiness. He stares at the sun that is beginning to drop towards the horizon, its light already weighted with the hint of an impending chill, and tries to ignore the talkative driver to his left. It is the same old ritual, and after seven rides he is tired of it. It is difficult to keep up the "hail-fellow" front of the wide-eyed traveller. Especially with this man. He is an ex-GI, full of dirty jokes

and old war stories, obviously not his own. The boy nods and grunts at the appropriate moments, but his mind is elsewhere, contemplating the sad beauty of the sun. Still a phrase catches his attention. He turns.

"What was it like?"

The man lights his cigarette, puzzled. "What was what like?"

"Vietnam. Didn't you just say you had been there?"

"Oh yeah, yeah, I did."

"So what was it like? What'd you think of it?"

The man pauses, a little surprised that the boy has finally asked him a question. For the first time that afternoon, he stops to think before he speaks. There is an intensity in his face, of recollection of the effort of expressing things only dimly understood in words, that momentarily gives him a touch of humanity. He blows out a cloud of smoke.

"It's funny," he says. "You don't think at all. At least that's not the important thing. Oh, back at camp, sure, when you feel safe you sit around and bullshit and try to figure what the hell's going on. But the important thing--

His eyes are radar; he drives without seeing and struggles to catch the important thing.

"The important thing is how it makes you feel, when you're out on patrol, or knowing you're about to go on patrol, or even when you're just walking down a street, to be aware that you might die, I mean, to know that somewhere out there, there's a guy that's trying to kill you. And you, him. You never think about it over here; at least I didn't. Not in the same way. Dying's a long way off; it's not with you every minute. But over there--

He shakes his head.

"It's so goddamned real you can't get away from it. That's the catch. It's not the idea, but the reality of your own death, staring you in the face every minute. You can never fully escape it; you can never shake the feeling that you're like an insect, wiggling in the flypaper, waiting for the pin in your back."

He shudders uncontrollably and realizes that he has rambled for several minutes. "That's what it was like." He finishes and crushes his cigarette in the ashtray. The boy, who has been listening intently, hesitates and then joins in the confessional.

"There's a way around that you know."

"Around what?"

"Around that feeling of insecurity about death. Being afraid of it."

"What do you mean? How?"

"Simple. By recognizing that it's an illusion to think that your existence matters or that you can do anything about when it starts and ends. You die when you were meant to die. Hell, I don't mean it's God or anything; it's just realizing that most things in life are beyond your control, and that you might as well just submit to what happens, to fate, or whatever. Then there's no struggle."

The man frowns.

"That's no good. It's just talk. Nobody can do that, not when it stares them in the face. Nobody just submits to chance."

"To fate. And some people can."

"Nobody can."

"I can--because I don't care."

The man is silent. He looks at the boy out of one eye and laughs, a short barking laugh, and drives on.

The car lurched violently as it left the smooth pavement and the tires hit the gravel on the side of the road. At the sound the boy jerked awake in time to see John sit up suddenly and twist the wheel to the left. He hit the brakes at the same time, and the car went into a spin, as the rear wheels grabbed for traction in the scattered roughage of the road's shoulder. The car made almost a complete circle before it came to a stop with the front end only inches away from a small guardrail running along the roadside. The tire had left a wide circle of rubber on the highway. The stench began to fill the air. The boy, his heart pounding, sat stiffly on the edge of his seat. In the front Ronnie raised his head from his chest and murmured casually to the driver.

"What happened, man?"

John's hands still clenched the steering wheel, but his face was calm.

"S'all right," he said. "I just dozed off for a second."

Ronnie nodded and slumped back against the door. The boy spoke up, his voice cracking.

"Listen, if you're tired I can drive."

John shook his head.

"No, no, I'm fine. It's just that stuff we took.

Trual. It's really a downer, man. You ever tried it?"

The boy leaned forward.

"Why didn't you tell me you'd taken something?"

he began angrily.

"I didn't think it'd bother you a whole lot, seeing as how it was sort've a bad night to be picky about rides. Besides you didn't complain to much while you were sleeping."

The boy listened, his lips pressed together in a tight line, and for the first time he became aware of his surroundings. They were level with the tops of the trees on the right side of the road. They were in the mountains.

"Where the hell are we, anyway? You said you were going to Washington."

"Cool it, man, we'll make it." John laughed. "We're just taking the scenic route along the Blue Ridge Parkway. You know, a little midnight joy-ride through authentic Americana. Now you just sit back and hold on tight, I'll get you to Washington before the chickens wake up."

John spoke rapidly and as he finished, he backed the car up on the road and began climbing again at a steadily increasing rate. The boy looked behind them and saw their tire tracks in the glow of the taillights. He also saw how the mountain sloped away three feet beyond the guardrail to a completely vertical drop that disappeared in the darkness hundreds of feet below them. But he said nothing. He sat back in his seat and stared at the back of John's head. Every few seconds he shut his eyes, only to open them again moments later. He watched silently as the speedometer began to creep upwards past 60, to 70, then 80.

"Slow down, man," he whispered.

"Don't worry, I drive this road all the time, stoned, drunk, and tripping. Why don't you relax? Go back to sleep."

The headlights revealed a sharp-turn sign a hundred feet down the highway. John mashed the brakes hard, but they were already into the turn. Again the tires screamed, as they fought to hold the pavement. In the back the boy was thrown from one side of the car to the other. The door handle

pressed into his ribs, and looking out the window, he saw there was no longer a guardrail on the roadside. There was only a thin shoulder that dropped off into an empty expanse of black sky.

"God damn it!" he shouted. "Slow down."

"Just cool it, will you." John was hunched over the steering wheel, his eyes fixed on the road. The back of his shirt was damp with his sweat. "I'm drivin'."

The boy wiped a drop of sweat from his cheek and pushed his hair back out of his eyes. He began to bite his lower lip. His eyes moved back and forth from John, to the road, to the emptiness. He took several deep breaths and fiddled nervously with the strap on his pack. A muscle cramped in his thigh, and he reached down to grab his leg. Suddenly a horn blasted, and he looked up into the headlights of another car coming around a curve. They were on the wrong side of the road. Both cars slammed their brakes, and at the last instant John swung his car to the right, barely missing the edge of the other's fender. Then they were around him and had left the other car behind, facing into the rock wall of the mountainside, its horn still blowing.

"Jesus," John whispered. "That was close."

The boy shivered uncontrollably, his face pale. The pain in his leg was intense, but he could not move it. There was no room to move it. And they were still going 80 miles an hour. He broke.

"God damn it, you crazy fool! Stop the car. Let me out!"

John did not turn around or slow down. The boy seized his shoulder and pinched hard.

"Do you hear me, you stupid son of a bitch. Stop the car. Stop the god damned car! Stop!"

John twisted under the boy's grip.

"Okay. Let go of me," he said. Cut it out for Christ's sake. I'm stopping."

He began slowing down, but the boy's hand remained on his shoulder until the car came to a complete stop. John stared straight ahead, as the boy pushed the seat forward with Ronnie in it, still passed out, and stepped outside, barely able to squeeze between the seat and the car's body. The car was moving, even before he slammed the door shut. A rear tire ran over the edge of his

pack before he could pull it out of the way. He stood there and watched as the red taillights ran up the mountainside, weaving slightly from left to right, until they passed from view around a curve.

It was freezing cold out. He zipped up his windbreaker and pulled the collar up around his neck. His body was still shaking, and his leg ached terribly. He looked around him at the wilderness and saw a road sign farther up the way. He walked toward it, dragging his pack and limping. He reached the sign and saw that it was a mileage marker. It said WASHINGTON 175. He smiled and

looked up at the sky. The moon had been down a long time. Now there was almost total darkness, broken only by a few scattered stars. He stared up at the sky for several minutes, and then, sitting down, he began to rub his sore calf with both hands. He hummed to himself. From far away down the mountain he could hear the faint sound of a car motor, winding its way up the steep grade. He smiled again, and rising from the ground, he walked over stand toby the edge of the pavement. Headlights appeared, playing off the wall of rocks across from him. The engine was much louder now. He stuck out his thumb -- and waited.

Rik Kirkland

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